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The Thin Line Between Protection, Care and Control: Violence Against Ethnic Minority Women in Denmark

Yvonne Mørck, Bo Wagner Sørensen, Sofie Danneskiold-Samsøe and Henriette Højberg

Since the first women's shelters were founded in Denmark about thirty years ago women from ethnic minority backgrounds have constituted a significant proportion of women fleeing violent men or families.¹ According to recent figures, 45 percent of women in Danish shelters were born outside Denmark, while even more defined themselves as ethnic minorities. Although they come from different countries – as many as 86 in 2008 (Barlach 2009)² – most of the women in shelters represented the larger non-Western immigrant groups from Turkey, Iraq, Bosnia, Thailand, Lebanon and Iran. The history of immigration to Denmark varies among these groups, with the largest group of immigrants and descendants being from Turkey. Immigrants and descendants total 9.5% of the entire population in Denmark, with the proportion from non-Western countries being 6.4% (Petersen et al. 2009).³ Because of the high numbers of ethnic minority women in the shelters, and because violence against ethnic minority women in Denmark is under-researched, a Danish shelter, Danner shelter, invited researchers to examine the possible relationship between violence and culture. Danner shelter was interested in knowing what kind of violence ethnic minority women flee, but also what the

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- 1 According to the first statistics 17.5% of women at Danner shelter had ethnic minority background in 1984. During the next twelve years their share increased gradually to 50% in 1996. The same year the national average was 38% (Jensen and Behrens 1997).
 - 2 Women who do not have Danish citizenship represent about 28 percent of the total number of women in the shelters. About half the women without Danish citizenship are marriage migrants (Barlach 2009). The figures are based on information from 1,476 women who, in 2008, lived in one of the 36 Danish shelters organised under LOKK, the Danish National Organisation of Shelters.
 - 3 Population statistics distinguish between foreigners of Western and non-Western origin. Bosnia is categorized as non-Western. The term foreigners is used as a common designation of immigrants and descendants. Descendants are defined as persons born in Denmark by parents born outside Denmark (Petersen et al. 2009). Such persons are often called second generation immigrants in the academic literature.

shelters currently have to offer these women and whether it is sufficient.⁴ This chapter is based on the initial results of this study.

Researchers dealing with violence seem to agree that inter-personal violence, wherever it takes place, is contested, and that it implies the use of force – or its threat – as a pre-emptive means to control and maintain dominance over others (Riches 1986a; Abbink 2000; Schröder & Schmidt 2001). From the perpetrator's perspective it is neither meaningless nor senseless. Jenkins (1997) suggests that violence to others may be the ultimate form of categorization: people are put in their (right) place. Or, in Lundgren's (1995) gendered perspective, women are confined and put in their place as part of a larger process of gender construction. At the same time, many ethnographic cross-cultural studies show that the extent and use of violence varies, and that explanations of violence differ at local levels. Studies also show how different social and cultural backgrounds are likely to frame violence in different ways and give rise to specific experiences (Riches 1986b; Harvey & Gow 1994; Counts, Brown and Campbell 1999; Sørensen 1998, 2001; Aijmer & Abbink 2000; Schmidt & Schröder 2001). This chapter focuses on both general and specific aspects of violence.

Danner shelter

Danner shelter is located in Copenhagen and it is one of the first shelters in Denmark. It is well known among the public and intimately associated with the women's movement.⁵ Lessons from Danner shelter show that the consequences of violence may be more devastating and prolonged for women from an ethnic minority background, not necessarily because of the nature of the violence but because of social and cultural circumstances. According to professionals at the shelter, many of these women are not only victims of violence, but also experience language barriers, lack of social networks, lack of knowledge and awareness of social and legal rights, and lack of employment

4 The project title is 'Violence in Ethnic Minority Families – a Qualitative Study with a Focus on Future Efforts'. The project has been conceived by Danner shelter and financed by the private foundation TrygFonden. Part of the project consists of a mapping of current offers to the women during and after their stay in the shelters. There is a special focus on the importance of aftercare as part of the shelter package.

5 Danner shelter has a long history. Originally, the Countess Danner, who was married to King Frederik VII, built the house in 1775. The purpose was to house single working class women. In 1960 the admission of women stopped and the Foundation Board let the house decay. The women's movement occupied the house in 1979 and turned the house into a shelter for battered women.

and education.⁶ These are the barriers that ethnic minority women face when they try to make an autonomous life without violence (Nielsen 2005). There are also significant differences among the women and thus their need for assistance; these include young women taking refuge from violence from their families and/or threat of forced marriage and foreign women married to husbands in Denmark.

Methodology

Our chapter is based on interviews with 13 ethnic minority women, aged 21–47, who agreed to share their stories of violence. Some were born in Denmark; others came to live with their husbands as so-called family reunified persons⁷ or they came as refugees with their parents. Women of Iraqi and Turkish descent present the largest group of interviewees.⁸ Most of the women were recruited through a number of shelters. Some were living at the shelter at the time of the interview while others had left the shelter and were interviewed in their own homes or elsewhere.

The women had been exposed to different kinds of violence for varying periods of time from parents, brothers, husbands, sons, or in-laws. Men were the common perpetrators and usually the more feared ones, whereas women tended to act as either accomplices to men or as substitutes for male heads of the family or household. Our data invited a broad definition of VAW such as the one adopted in 1993 by the UN General Assembly, which includes any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Economic deprivation is another aspect worth mentioning. A narrow definition is not able to encompass the many aspects of violence and it tends to overlook that VAW is a structural and processual phenomenon.

The chapter focuses on three themes that emerged from the interviews: how cultural belonging and loyalty make it difficult to speak out about violence; how family honour and the ideal of protection gloss over actual control and violence; and how suffering and care intertwine with power and legitimize violence.

6 Crenshaw (1994) talks about structural intersectionality and how it shapes the experiences of many women of colour; or in our case, ethnic minority women.

7 Family reunification is a legal term that covers marriage migration among others.

8 The interviewed women originate from the following countries: 4 from Iraq, 3 from Turkey, 2 from Sri Lanka, 1 from Morocco, 1 from Iran, 1 from Ukraine, 1 from Lithuania. All the interviewees' names have been changed.

Cultural loyalty and the problem of speaking out

Our material shows that gender-based violence is a big taboo in ethnic minority families. Several of the women believed VAW to be widespread both in the country of origin and in the ethnic minority community in Denmark. However, since divorce is disapproved of, few women dared to take that step and gossip is often used as a weapon of social control. People spoke badly about women like Divani, a Tamil women who has lived in Denmark most of her adult life, who chose to leave her husband after many years of mental and physical violence: *'You have no life when you have thrown your husband out. Then you are alone. You can do nothing'*.

There are two main reasons why the interviewed women had concealed the violence, namely loyalty to the family and threats of (more and more severe) violence. A recurrent theme in the women's narratives is the importance of not disclosing the violence to outsiders, including others in their community⁹ and Danes, such as teachers and social workers, who represent the public system. According to the women interviewed, the family (either their own and/or their family-in-law) perceived reporting the violence to authorities as a betrayal: one fails one's family by telling someone outside the family what is happening in the private sphere. This may play a major role in explaining why very few women reported the perpetrators to the police. Interviewees had put up with extremely severe violence for many years before they finally broke with the culturally based attitudes and spoke out about it.

The women, however, also concealed the violence from family members. Women hiding violence committed by a partner from their families is one variation of this concealment. This involved women who had engaged in premarital sexual relationships or who had entered a Muslim marriage without parental consent. In such cases, the 'secret' partner made threats of revealing their relationship to her family to make the woman stay in the relationship and/or to behave as he demanded (e.g. to have an abortion). Yet another form of this concealment is seen in Divani's story. For many years, she disguised her husband's violence from her relatives for fear of upsetting them, even though they lived in Denmark. When she finally left her husband, she still

9 All ethnic communities are heterogeneous regarding e.g. gender, class, age, religious and political belonging. They are also filled with contradictions and contestations in relation to issues concerning gender and sexuality. However, the interviewees have not experienced much support from neither relatives nor other members of what they refer to as 'their' ethnic community. Baumann (1996) writes that it makes a difference whether one postulates communities defined by some ethnic culture or one discerns different cultures within a community.

found it difficult to reveal the violence, especially to her parents, because she had concealed the truth from them for so long. Thus, even if the abused woman has family members in Denmark, with whom she has a good relationship, there is no guarantee that she will seek their assistance.

Such reasons for concealing the violence can be conceptualized as 'cultural loyalty' where the central question is: How can one be loyal to one's culture and religious background, while simultaneously adopting a critical position against inequality and oppression (Ahmed 1984; Mørck 1998), such as violence against women and children? Cultural loyalty is important for understanding why women did not leave the violence much earlier.¹⁰ The potential harm to the family's reputation, honour and image resulting from disclosure can be a key reason for women maintaining secrecy (Gill 2009). Several of the young women reported that their parents feared that if their daughters destroyed the family's reputation, the parents would not be able to function socially in their communities. Their brothers, however, could do what they wanted.

The interviewees talked about gender perceptions, a collective perception of personhood and religious understandings that are used in their families' countries of origin and in the ethnic minority communities as 'arguments' for others to control their life, body and sexuality (Mørck 2000). Perpetrators concealed the violence from the majority society by emphasizing the cultural and/or religious identity of women. In doing so they constructed a dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', which they used to keep the daughter or woman in 'her right place'. In several cases, parents had described Danes in negative terms throughout their daughters' childhood. Nada, who had been abused by her mother, related how her mother constantly stressed that the family is Muslim when she and her siblings started in a Danish school. They were told to keep away from the Danes: *'We should not talk with them. We should keep ourselves from white people. We should not eat their food because it is pork. There were many things we should be careful about. We should not talk to guys'*. Her mother had been very concerned with, and from the age of 10 had monitored, Nada's body, for love bites and searched her schoolbag and mobile phone to see if she had contact with boys. Nada was not allowed by her mother to have Danish friends: *'My mom could see that I preferred the Danish culture and not where I came from'*. This can be interpreted both as a

10 In their analysis of domestic violence services for minoritized women in England, Burman, Smailes & Chantler (2004) propose the term 'cultural privacy' for a parallel phenomenon, namely how organizations, including the police, do not get involved out of respect for the women's culture and the fear of being labelled as racist. The result is that violence is silenced.

strategy to keep the violence hidden and to prevent Nada from embracing Danish norms and lifestyles.

Several of the women reflected on whether they had done the right thing by going to a shelter, as for most of them this choice had meant not only a break up with their parents but with the whole family. Punida, who had been subjected to violence from her parents, wondered if she should have resigned herself to a life of violence and submitted to the rules of her parents, e.g. by not talking to young men. However, as she explained, the situation for young people who have grown up in Denmark is complex, creating difficulty with living in two worlds: *'When at home one is Tamil, and when at school one is Danish'*.

However, women who came to Denmark as adults and who broke social conventions and conformities also have to deal with questions of loyalty and cultural identity. Iraqi Samia came to Denmark to live with her husband of Iraqi descent but was now divorced. She also found herself in a difficult position in relation to cultural loyalty and cultural identity:

When one is stuck between two cultures it is difficult to know what is right. People from my culture say that I am a bad woman – I am divorced and live alone. Danes understand me much better. But it is hard for me to be a Dane. I would like to, but I cannot ... because I always come back to my culture.

Samia came from an urban liberal family and was shocked at how her life was restricted from the outset when she moved in with her husband and in-laws. She was worried about her daughters' future and while Samia thought it acceptable for her daughters to have boyfriends when they grew up, she was concerned about what her ex-husband, other family members and others in the Iraqi community would say and if they would resort to violence.

Threats of physical violence, including murder threats and attempts were the second main reason why women did not report the violence. This combined with the fear that the violence would worsen if they talked about it to professionals, such as teachers or social services. If they suspect or even have experienced that an attempt to get help with leaving the violence did not lead to a wholehearted effort, it can, as several of the women's stories show, be a very risky endeavour. Nada from Iraq is a case in point. When she finally revealed, in school, how bad things were at home, she was forcibly removed from the home. However, the family moved to another municipality that would not pay for her stay in a foster family, and she was sent back home to an unusually violent mother who got her into a forced marriage at the age of 14.

Women who speak out reflect on questions of loyalty, culture and identity: Am I supposed to put up with violence to be a true Tamil or Iraqi

woman? Or should I seize the opportunities offered in Denmark to live a life free of violence? They also make a kind of risk calculation: Is it more dangerous to speak out than to stay? Will anyone believe and support me in breaking out of the violence?

Family honour and the ideal of protection

Most of the interviewees talked about family honour and its importance to their families. As women they were central to the maintenance of family honour, which, according to some of the young interviewees, meant that they were *'living in a kind of open prison'* with their every step watched and scrutinized. Rumours and gossip within their community seemed to have a devastating effect on the women's lives (cf. Eldén 2003). No matter how well they behaved and the extent to which they adopted a 'good girl' position, it was seen to never be enough. 'People' or 'they' were recurrent terms in the interviews. Both seemed to refer to the ever-watching community.

Emine, a young woman of Turkish background, reflected on her family's reaction to her escape from home to a shelter, saying that her mother was only worried about what she had told the staff and about any gossip. She explained: *'My mother is so concerned about what other people might say. It is a matter of honour. If people can talk about me and put my family down ... that is what they live for. They live to humiliate one another'*. It was Emine's perception that people in her community constantly sought to put others down. Within this, young women embody the battle of honour and recognition that is fought among families: *'Ask every girl of ethnic [minority] background ... they are all afraid that someone might say something about them, or that their family might hear something about them. That is the problem they face in their everyday life'*.¹¹

Most of the other young interviewees' stories confirm these remarks. They speak about strict rules administered by their parents, and how the prohibitions serve to set them apart from their classmates or colleagues because they were only allowed to go directly to school and/or work and back again. Every little transgression was punished with violence by either parent. Although they went to school and sometimes were allowed to go to work, they

11 The young woman says 'they' when she refers to her own ethnic community, but this is probably no coincidence. It appears from the interview that she feels abused by her family and does not expect anything good from the Turkish community, which she tends to describe in monolithic terms. She even considers 'going Danish', skipping all relations to 'foreigners' as she calls them, taking a typical Danish name and becoming blond, etc.

led secluded lives and were expected to stay at home whenever possible. The usual reason given for the seclusion was '*girls carry the family honour*'. For one of the young women, Noha, the concept of family honour came down to one thing, namely an intact hymen: '*They see you as a sex organ somehow, only with legs*'. The maintenance of virginity was recurrent in many of the young women's stories, suggesting that it is an important cultural issue for some (cf. Aamand & Uddin 2007; Mørck 1998).

Seen from an internal perspective, protecting the family honour can mean protecting women against the dangers of the outside world, and against their own desires. Papanek (1973) writing about purdah, the institutional practice of female seclusion in much of South Asia, has coined the concept of 'symbolic shelter'. She suggests that female seclusion is centred on a strongly felt tension between the kin unit and the outside world, which is seen as a difficult and hostile place. Thus what is implied in the concept is that something and someone needs to be protected from forces originating elsewhere. This task, in turn, requires a profound differentiation between persons who need protection and those who provide it. According to Papanek, it is here that the deepest inequality is assumed because the entire system of seclusion is based on certain assumptions about the nature of women and men.

Our material shows clearly that the interviewees were neither expected nor trusted to be able to protect themselves. Whilst the unmarried women were subjected to many rules and regulations and parental control over their whereabouts, the married women were subjected to the control of their husbands and families-in-law. It is also evident that men are assumed to be the natural protectors of women and that protection is hard to separate from control. Papanek's question, 'What are these women being sheltered from?' may have an ironic undertone, because what happens when it turns out that the outside world is much less dangerous to women than the sheltered one? Discussing honour-based violence, Gill (2009) argues that it has the patina of social respectability, yet paves the way for other forms of gender-based violence and that honour, far from being a celebration of women's dignity and social importance, actually leads to their victimization and abuse. Numerous examples from our material confirm the vulnerability of women whose protectors were also their abusers; the following two examples are typical.

Fadia, an Iraqi woman, came to Denmark with her parents as a refugee when she was 15. At the age of 16 her father forced her to marry a man of Iraqi descent. Her father received 50,000 DKK for her. She fled her husband after just a few months, returning to her parents and began working in unskilled jobs. Her father collected the money she earned. When she was 21 her father traded her once more; this time to another Iraqi man who lived in Germany. She had a son in this short and unhappy marriage, but her husband

kept the child in agreement to grant her divorce. Losing her child in that way caused a mental breakdown and she was hospitalized for a few months. When she got back to her parents, her father had another husband for her who was almost 40 years older than she was. Her protests were met with sanctions from her father who locked her up in a room and threatened that she would never come out alive. She stayed in the room for three days without food until she managed to escape through the window and found her way to a shelter. Her father controlled everything in the family; when she was asked to explain why her father beat her, she said '*They are Muslims with many rules*'. Her father had said that he would always control her, even when she married. He beat her whenever he thought she did something wrong or said something he did not like.

Samia who came to Denmark to live with her newly married husband of Iraqi descent soon found herself in a very strict environment, living with her husband, his younger brother and her mother-in-law. She faced social isolation and economic deprivation and, ultimately, was exposed to severe physical violence when she began thinking about getting a divorce. She was not allowed to talk to her family in Iraq or to have female friends, and he told her what clothes to wear. When she filed for divorce after years of physical and mental abuse, her husband abducted her one night and put her on a plane to Iraq where he intended to dump her after having taken her passport. She could not give up her children, however, so she went to the Danish embassy and managed to get back to Denmark. Her husband was angry about her return, believing that he had managed to get her out of the country. According to Samia, her husband and his family tried to dump her in Iraq because: '*They cannot have a divorced, single woman walking about in Denmark*'. Apparently a divorcee living on her own presents a threat to a man's honour and self-representations (Moore 1994), as the single woman is proof that women can protect themselves and be in control, which makes men redundant as protectors/controllers. The single or unsheltered woman also testifies to the fact that her ex-husband did not do his job well enough.

The game of suffering and care

When Adile came to Denmark as a marriage migrant she did not know her in-laws and she was unprepared for the life they forced on her. Her new mother-in-law told Adile that she was worn out by hard work in order to earn money and to establish a home in Denmark and a house back in Turkey. According to the mother-in-law, Adile was lucky to have it all ready for her and

enjoy the fruit of their hard work. Consequently, Adile was expected to do all the housework in the common home and to care for her parents-in-law, including cutting their finger and toe nails and undressing them and put them to bed in the evening. Not until then could she rest herself. She ate her meals alone in the kitchen while the rest of the family ate together. She was not allowed to leave the apartment, and the only contact she had with the outside world was calling her parents in Turkey twice a year and speaking with them on the phone under the surveillance of the parents-in-law. She spent most of her time alone at home, crying in secret as her parents-in-law rejected the sight of any tears. Adile described her husband as a child obeying the words of his parents and not criticising them for how they treated her.

Many of the interviewed women had similar stories to tell about self-pity on the part of their abusers for their situations that legitimized exploitation and control of daughters-in-law. As Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) argue, emotions are often pragmatic acts and communicative performances rather than internal states of individuals. Adile's parents-in-law believed they had provided and suffered and that somebody had to compensate for all this. When her in-laws practiced dominance through demands for personal care, the dominance became even more humiliating. In Adile's case, the demand for care was extreme; however, in order to understand the violence that takes place in the intimate space of families, one has to consider the daily struggle to get recognition for suffering and corresponding care (Das 1997; Danne-skiold-Samsøe 2006).

The ethnographic literature on the Middle East suggests a general strained relationship between wives and their in-laws (Choudry 1996; Fernandez 1997; Hegland 1999; Ghanim 2009). According to Hegland, in-laws feel that a daughter-in-law must be controlled and distanced from her husband. Whilst parents often rely on the income and labour of their son they consider it to be in their interest for their daughter-in-law to be cowed and submissive rather than a part of a decision-making husband-wife team. The daughter-in-law is seen as a potential competitor for (scarce) resources. This may be part of the explanation why none of our informants spoke nicely of their in-laws. When kinship, gender and generation intersect, daughters-in-law are in a weak position vis-à-vis their in-laws. In cases where they rebel – by disobeying, talking back or not performing the duties required of them – they are punished. Violence is used as a teaching device; a means for making women behave and accept dominance.

Parents, in-laws and husbands often legitimate dominance by referring to family loyalty (cf. Wikan 1996; Prieur 2002). They use notions of the 'common good' to confine the young women of the family, and violence often takes place with reference to alignment to the common good of the family.

The women described their families as social hierarchies determining not only who could force their will on others, but also who was in a position to have his or her sufferings acknowledged and consequently claim the right to be cared for. Young women, daughters and wives, were placed at the bottom of such a hierarchy of violence, suffering and care: they were victims of violence and at the same time they found little understanding for their predicaments.

However, few positions are unequivocal and most positions exist somewhere in a continuum of absolute dominance and complete subordination. Adile's husband exemplifies the position of intermediary pinched between the dominance of his parents on the one side and (expectations of) sympathy for his wife on the other. He does not beat her physically and he does not approve of his parents' exploitation of his wife, yet he does nothing to change her conditions and by not taking a stand he is a passive accomplice.

Noha's Moroccan parents maltreated and beat her throughout her entire childhood while she grew up in a little town near Copenhagen. Physical violence was part of everyday life and Noha heard her father brag about how he had beaten her since she was three days old. He was trained in martial arts and knew where to hit without it showing. Usually he would use his fist on her scalp or lash her bottom with his belt (and the buckle when he wanted it to really hurt). Noha's father did not beat her as often as her mother did though as he was more absent. Instead, Noha's mother would hit her more often, usually two or three times a week, slapping her face or pulling her hair. The worst part, for Noha was not the physical violence but the derogatory language of her mother who talked badly about Noha in front of friends and family. According to Noha, *'words hurt more than strokes'*. Even though she did her best to fulfil the expectations and demands of her parents, she was made to feel she was never good enough. She had to be a good daughter doing housework and looking after her brothers, being a studious and able student, and looking pretty, presentable and virtuous.

When Noha was 9 years old, her younger brother died of an illness and her mother became depressed. At that time, her mother slept all day and was not able to do any housework and Noha took over entirely. Noha became the one her mother would talk to about her lost son. Being preoccupied with her own concerns Noha's mother did not recognise any of Noha's problems; Noha's uncle abused her sexually for years, she started excessive eating that turned into bulimia, and she tried to escape the control at home. Noha's mother finally rebelled by claiming her right to the deed of some property she and her husband had built in Morocco. During this dispute Noha's father eventually left her mother. Noha's father moved abroad and was only able to maintain threats of violence and Noha's mother stopped her usual slapping altogether.

As Noha's story illustrates, mothers as intermediaries can be significant in the continuation or termination of violence. When the mother rebels against domination she may also reject passing on domination on her daughter. Being a victim of violence herself, Noha's mother feared the reactions and violence of her husband and she assisted in maintaining order in the family through warnings, threats and scorn, whereas the father was a more distant, but not less intimidating, authority. As an intermediary the mother became a victim and perpetrator at the same time. Like Noha's mother some mothers were merely an extension of a father's or husband's power. Other mothers tried to mediate between fathers and daughters, passing on orders, but interceding with the father as well. The interviewees expressed a tacit expectation – or at least hope – that their mothers would understand, protect and care for them. Hence, when mothers could not live up to that expectation, some interviewees expressed great resentment. Noha was left alone with her problems and suffered low self-esteem. She and some of the other interviewees directed their frustrations towards themselves and became self-destructive, and they told us about eating disorders, cutting and suicide attempts.

Abusive mothers and mothers-in-law do not fit easily into our feminist inspired definition of gender-based violence. However, women's violence towards other, usually younger, less powerful women can be seen as part and parcel of maintaining a gender order by putting the younger women in their right place and installing an expectation in them that they, in turn, can look forward to an increase in power within the gender order as they get older (Brown 1999; Brown and Kerns 1985).

Conclusion

Our interviewees' stories of violence have shown a common underlying pattern in that the women's lives have been controlled to such a degree that they have been left with no alternative but to leave their husbands and/or families. Some of the women presented their decision to leave as a matter of life and death. The women expressed disappointment and resentment. Their expectations of marriage and family life had not been met. The ideal and promise of protection and care – aspects of the symbolic shelter – turned out to be more rhetoric than reality as real life tipped towards isolation, control and violence, and women were reduced to pawns in the hands of the more powerful who demand care for themselves. Still the women have been reluctant to let go of their families and communities; a conflict of family and cultural loyalty seem

to be ever present, and some women tend to get stuck. This ambivalence towards a stand on violence is the Gordian knot for the shelters to untie.

The Danish welfare state has been described as 'woman friendly' (Hernes 1987). To ethnic minority women who have realised that the inside world is more troublesome and dangerous than the outside world it does present a kind of external protection against internal restrictions (Kymlicka 1999). Shelters and economic independence for women make it possible to take the first step towards greater control of their own lives, bodies and sexuality.

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